

Altoona Trust Company Building  
1128-30 12th Avenue  
Intown Neighborhood  
Altoona  
Blair County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5511

HABS  
PA,  
7-ALTO,  
96 -

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALTOONA TRUST COMPANY BUILDING

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- Location: 1128-30 12th Ave. (northern corner of 12th Street and 12th Avenue), Altoona, Blair County, Pa.
- Present Owner: Mid-State Bank.
- Present Use: The building serves as the corporate headquarters for Mid-State Bank. The banking room comprises the main floor; the bank's administrative offices occupy the rest of the building.
- Significance: The Altoona Trust Building, the work of Mowbray and Uffinger of New York in 1901, was the first Classical Revival-style building in downtown Altoona. The U-shaped, five-story building introduced new materials--gray brick, limestone and terra cotta--to the predominantly red-brick cityscape and was the first downtown office building to host an electric elevator. Members of the building committee reported that they hoped "the creation of an imposing bank building would lend prestige and stability to the business [and] quicken its growth. . . ." One of only three local banks to survive the Depression, Altoona Trust Company has grown to become one of the largest financial institutions in central Pennsylvania.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1901-02. The building opened to the public January 1, 1903.
2. Architect: The New York firm of Mowbray and Uffinger was responsible for the design.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In May 1901, the stockholders of the newly formed Altoona Trust Company authorized the purchase of a site at the northeast corner of 12th Street and 12th Avenue for their new bank. The property, which included several single-family, frame houses and a commercial shop, cost \$24,000.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: The building consisted of an elegant first-floor banking room, accessible from the primary entrance on the corner, and ninety-four rental offices providing "every modern accommodation found in office buildings in New York or Philadelphia." (Altoona Mirror [October 26, 1901]) A secondary entrance on 12th Street provided access to upper stories. The exterior of the building is in virtually unaltered condition; in contrast, the banking room and offices have been remodelled several times, obscuring the original plans and materials.
6. Alterations and additions: By 1929, Altoona Trust Company had outgrown its original offices. The company hired the local architectural firm of Hunter and Caldwell to design new bookkeepers' quarters, a boardroom, and restrooms in an additional 40' section on the northwest side of the first floor. Hunter and Caldwell also redesigned the tellers' area, replacing old wickets and grills with more modern, lower ones. (Portions of these wickets still remain.) Other renovations included the installation of bronze entrance doors, a safety deposit lobby, and a new vault in the rear of the building, which was entered through the machine room. New telephone and ventilation systems were also provided. ("Altoona Trust to Occupy New Quarters," Altoona Mirror, July 26, 1930)

The banking floor and offices have undergone renovations many times since the 1930s; by 1976,

dropped ceilings and other new materials had been installed throughout the building. On the exterior, the pediment and rooftop balustrade and the decorative railings above both entrances were removed sometime after 1966.

B. Historical Context:

The city's fifth bank, Altoona Trust Company was founded in April 1901 by a group of prominent businessmen from Hollidaysburg, Altoona, and Pittsburgh. Theater owner I. C. Mishler, department store magnate William F. Gable, and contractor W. V. Hughes were among the bank's founding stockholders. Until the present Altoona Trust Building was completed, the bank leased temporary offices in the Blumenthal Building at 1128 11th Ave. On October 28, 1901, Altoona Trust Company opened for business in banking quarters described by the Altoona Mirror as "a room fitted up tastefully. [It] will answer nicely until the company's own building is completed."<sup>1</sup>

The Altoona Trust Building was erected in 1901-02, opening on January 1, 1903. Only two-thirds of the offices were rented during the bank's first few years of operation due to the uncertain financial climate of 1907-08. By 1909, however, the members of the building committee could report to the board of directors that the new building had fulfilled their expectations:

We did not expect at any time that our main profits would be realized from rents, but did hope the creation of an imposing bank building would lend prestige and stability to the business, quicken its growth, furnish a comfortable, durable, and economical home, and thus prove a good investment, and after seven years experience, results have proved so.<sup>2</sup>

The offices were regarded as some of the most prestigious in the city; notable tenants included Shollar and Hersh, architects, from 1903-15, and several major coal mining companies, that established headquarters there.

The Altoona Trust Company was one of three local financial institutions to survive the Depression. In 1932, its first branch was opened in the defunct Union Bank located at 8th Avenue and 12th Street; the five-story brick building is no longer extant. A third branch was established in Morrison's Cove in 1955; the "Auto Bank" drive-through windows on 12th Avenue constituted a fourth branch office established in 1958. By 1976, the bank had grown to include more than twenty branch offices.

In 1959, the Altoona Trust Company merged with the Central Trust Company to form the Altoona Central Bank and Trust Company. Central Trust's former building at 1218 11th Ave. served as the new organization's customer accounting department until the late 1970s. When the bank merged with the First Bellefont Bank and Trust Company in 1966, the name was changed to the Mid-State Bank and Trust Company. The original Altoona Trust Building now serves as the corporate headquarters of this new company, which continues to operate under its original charter of 1901.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

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<sup>1</sup>Altoona Mirror (October 26, 1901). A complete list of original shareholders can be found in Mid-State Bank 1901-1976 (Altoona: Mid-State Bank and Trust Company, 1976), 5. A first-rate, comprehensive history of Altoona Trust Company, this book should be consulted for more detailed information on the bank's financial and social history.

<sup>2</sup>"Report of the Building Committee to the Board of Directors," quoted in Mid-State Bank 1901-1976, 7.

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1. Architectural character: The severe gray stone and brick building is enlivened by neo-Baroque surface ornamentation and a variety of window treatments.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. The building was sandblasted in 1966.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The five-story, U-shaped building has a rounded corner at the 12th Avenue and 12th Street intersection and extends approximately 50' (three bays on 12th Street) x 120' (nine bays on 12th Avenue.)
2. Foundations: Granite.
3. Walls: The first story is faced in Bedford ashlar limestone, while the upper stories are faced with a Pompeiian gray pressed brick in stretcher bond. Oval cartouches are mounted between each of the first-floor windows. A terra cotta band in a Greek key design extends across the street and avenue facades, visually separating the second and third floors. Simple, molded bands of limestone separate the first floor from the second, and the fourth from the fifth. The two rear facades have plain brick walls.
4. Structural systems: Steel frame with brick interior walls.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The bank entrance at the rounded corner is flanked by engaged, polished granite columns supporting a denticulated cornice with a frieze reading, "ALTOONA TRUST CO." The frieze at the secondary entrance on 12th Avenue reads "OFFICES." Modern glass and aluminum double doors have recently replaced the bronze doors of 1929.
  - b. Windows: On the street and avenue facades, the first-floor windows are round-arched, with marked voussoirs and projecting keystones. The windows on the upper stories are paired and have flat arches. The second-floor windows have decorative surrounds and scrolled keystones, while the third- and fourth-floor windows are set in terra cotta panels; they also have scrolled keystones. The fifth-story windows have plain keystones. Most of the windows in the light well on the southeast facade have been bricked up. They appear to have been fitted originally with metal grills, or perhaps shutters; although these no longer survive, metal hinges remain embedded in the masonry.
6. Roof: The denticulated and modillioned terra cotta cornice is topped by a parapet wall which obscures the flat roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. First: The corner entrance opens onto the banking floor, which was originally finished with San Domingo mahogany cabinetwork and imported marble counters. The tellers' wickets had marble bases and wrought-bronze teller's screens. The teller's cages, since removed, were covered by steel, burglar-proof grills with self-closing gates. The present teller's wickets are a vestige of the 1929 renovation. The area behind the banking room was originally subdivided into suites of offices, each fitted with a wash bowl, gas and

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electric fixtures, and finished with red oak woodwork. Now this area contains bank offices. The first floor is also equipped with two vaults--a safety deposit vault and a hook vault--visible from the street at all times. The floor-to-ceiling height is 18'. (Altoona Mirror, [October 26, 1901])

The secondary entrance on 12th Street leads to an elevator lobby with two modern elevators. Like the banking floor and offices, this area has also been recently renovated with a dropped ceiling and vinyl paneling.

- b. Second-Fifth: Typically, the upper floors consist of a U-shaped hallway lit on each end by windows. Offices open off the left of the hallway.
- 2. Stairways: A cast-metal stairway in the elevator lobby rises five stories along the southeast side of the building and opens onto offices to the left of the landing.
- 3. Flooring: In 1929, a marble floor replaced the original Italian tile flooring of the banking room. Most of the offices now have wall-to-wall carpeting, a modernization of the last ten years.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: A ca. 1903 photograph of the banking room shows an ornate plasterwork ceiling with decorative beams running parallel to 12th Avenue. There were also several freestanding columns with Corinthian caps supporting the ceiling in the banking room; these still stand but are completely covered with new materials. Dropped ceilings and vinyl wall coverings have been installed throughout the building.
- 5. Doors: Modern wood or glass and aluminum interior doors.
- 6. Original mechanical systems:
  - a. Heating: Originally steam; gas heating was installed in 1952.
  - b. Lighting: The building was originally equipped with both gas and electric lighting. Originally, cast-metal chandeliers, each with four opaque glass domes, were suspended from the center of the banking room.
  - c. Elevators: Two electric elevators provide access to the upper floors.
- D. Site: The Altoona Trust Building stands at the northeast corner of 12th Street and 12th Avenue. Parking lots for Mid-State Bank surround the building on its northeast and northwest sides. At one time, however, the bank was part of a dense, mixed residential and commercial streetscape. In 1932, the three-story, brick Ramey property at 1117 12th Ave. ("a very fine residence"), and the adjacent frame building (a market, restaurant, automobile sales room, and miniature golf course, at various times), were razed to make room for customer parking. In 1966, the 56-year-old Colonial Hotel on 12th Avenue was razed, the site black-topped, and opened for customer parking.<sup>3</sup>

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: None located.

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<sup>3</sup>"Old Landmark in City Comes Down," Altoona Mirror (June 25, 1932). Mid-State Bank 1901-1976, 16.

B. Views:

1. Photograph of the first-floor interior from the southeast, showing the original banking floor. Altoona: Bonine Photo Studio, ca. 1903. Collection of Mid-State Bank.
2. The Altoona Mirror library has a 1966 photograph of the building in which the original pediment, rooftop balustrade, and railings appear intact.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources:

Altoona Mirror:

"Altoona Trust Company," (October 26, 1901).

"Altoona Trust to Occupy New Quarters," (July 26, 1930).

"Bank to Enlarge Work Space," (March 22, 1920).

"Old Landmark in City Comes Down," (June 25, 1932), discusses the history of the Ramey property at 1117 12th Ave., which was demolished by the Altoona Trust Company for a parking lot, and laments the transformation of this avenue into a commercial thoroughfare.

"Rothert Building, Mishler Theatre and Elks Home Burned This Morning," (October 19, 1906), includes a description of the relatively minor damage to the Altoona Trust Building.

2. Secondary sources:

Mid-State Bank 1901-1976. Altoona: Mid-State Bank and Trust Company, 1976.

Wolf, George A., ed. Blair County's First Hundred Years: 1846-1946. Altoona: The Mirror Press, 1945.

- E. Additional Sources: Minutes from the meetings of the Board of Directors, which do survive in the bank's archives, could provide additional insights into the selection of the site, the architectural firm, and the building's design, etc. The New York firm Mowbray and Uffinger (in business in the late 1920s) merits further attention, as well.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and an overview of the downtown (HABS No. PA-5789) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

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This report was prepared by Nancy Spiegel in the summer of 1989 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Spiegel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace and Sara Amy Leach.